JEAN GIRAUDOUX'S USE OF THE METAPHOR

BY
LAURENCE LESAGE
A.B., University of Illinois, 1935
A.M., University of Illinois, 1936

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
FRENCH IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1940

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The years following the close of the first World War have seen the rise and predominance of a new literary process known as imagism. Imagism consists in the exploitation of the image, not so much for stylistic decoration as for rapid and vivid communication and for its intrinsic value as a psychological or even a metaphysical process. There are as yet no general studies on modern imagism; so in order to comprehend the nature of this twentieth century *dolce stil nuovo,* we have chosen for our particular investigation its most outstanding exponent, Jean Giraudoux. A somewhat intensive analysis of his processes will indicate the general characteristics of the movement. The metaphors of Giraudoux will be examined from the point of view of sensory content, characteristic themes, form, and significance. Because of the breadth of the material, it has seemed advisable to choose examples only from works of fiction. Even with this limitation, our illustrations are designed to be representative rather than inclusive.

The novel as conceived by Jean Giraudoux has become a long metaphorical divagation, studded with brilliant flashes of wit and lyrical outbursts. His mode of writing is at once daringly original and representative of the contemporary literary *Zeitgeist.* But however independent his inspiration may be, Giraudoux's art springs at least in part from literary doctrines and practices of the past. In addition to his rich heritage from his native land, his education and travel contributed to his literary development by revealing the treasures of antiquity and the message of German romanticism. Numerous allusions to Greek and Roman literature reflect the thorough grounding in the classics which has been traditionally a part of the French educational system. Only a capable Hellenist could have written *Elpénor.* Giraudoux's predilection for the spontaneous Latin authors—Pliny, Tacitus, and Seneca—indicates the mainspring of his own writing, that is, spontaneity. In French literature he takes the stand for medieval literature against classicism as formulated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the barren logic and artificiality of the latter he turns to the sublimity of the *chansons de geste* and the quaint naturalness of popular literature of the Middle Ages. Epic themes are not wanting in his works; but

because they are treated lightly and because Giraudoux lacks theological preoccupation, he can be identified only remotely with the Middle Ages. His tendency toward word play and preciosity makes him seem more akin to the *Grands Rhétoriqueurs* and to writers of the seventeenth century who escape the yoke of classicism. There is no doubt that La Fontaine is a literary ancestor of Jean Giraudoux. The hollow bombast of French romanticism leaves him unmoved; the patient craftsmanship and the scientific aims of realism call forth his denunciation. Zola he refers to as "abominable." His field of concentration at the École Normale was German literature; his first professional literary associates were symbolists. The principles of German romanticism and French symbolism converge to orient the art of Giraudoux. The two literary movements had much in common. They substituted intuition for reason or logic, declaring objective and absolute criteria of values null and void. Imitation as an artistic principle was replaced by creation controlled only by a sense of humor. Generally speaking, this is Giraudoux's point of view.

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More important than literary influences in determining Giraudoux's art is his psychological make-up. There are a number of factors in his personality which are reflected in the character of his work. First of all the imaginal content of his thought processes is preponderant. He declares that abstractions without images are meaningless to him. His work offers abundant examples of this somewhat child-like tendency. Giraudoux's world is like that dreamed by a child. In this world there is no hierarchy of established values. Accepted categories of time and space are dissolved, everything is confused with everything else. Such an approach discloses subtle affinities among things which cold reason would not permit. It leads to a sort of pantheism—personification and symbolism are the most obvious types of metaphor in Giraudoux's works. This is his diagnosis of his preciosity, although one may point to additional manifestations. Critics offer a variety of definitions. Some refer to his facility, his astounding mental agility, and are wary. Others call it spontaneous exuberance, simply originality. Giraudoux protests that his extravagance is a very human fault, inevitable because of his lack of artifice. Another prominent feature of his preciosity is the banishment from his works of ugly details and unpleasant situations. Be-

cause of this he is charged with superficiality. The fact that he does not deny the accusation is further proof of his systematic refusal to take himself too seriously. Jean Giraudoux is a *précieux,* but emphatically not a *précieux ridicule.* His sense of humor, his sparkling gaiety keep his metaphorical excesses from being unduly heavy or absurd.

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Although sensory motivation for the Giralducian metaphor is conspicuously subordinate to the intellectual, it occurs frequently enough to warrant a particular investigation and classification. Visual imagery is by far the most common. Simple colors are, however, rather rare, but at times color plus form seems to determine an image. Some color symbolism may be observed. Effects of luminosity prove more suggestive than specific color. Giraudoux is a chiaroscurist *par excellence.* Lines and forms provide the inspiration for a great many daring analogies. Many are humorous, some grotesque; others are dainty and exquisite, while in some the vision approaches the sublime. Similar to the images based on line or form are those suggested by the physical attitude or gesture of persons. This group reveals especially well the flights of fancy of which our author is capable. Movement has great appeal: motor images are in abundance. By personification even the static in nature becomes animated. Aural images tend toward minor non-musical sounds. They reveal an interesting confusion of the visual and the auditory. Giraudoux's characteristic ingenuity is more apparent than any special sensitivity to sounds. Tactile imagery, by reference to beautiful fabrics, etc., adds a voluptuous appeal. Antithesis of sensations such as hard and soft is an outstanding feature of the imagery based upon touch. Thermic sensations seem to preoccupy Giraudoux more than most writers. They provide the stimulus for a number of subtle combinations. Weight, too, is given an unusual prominence. Olfactory and gustatory suggestions are least frequent of all in his imagery.

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The terms of Giraudoux's metaphors, which are often connected by the slenderest and seemingly most far-fetched analogy, are characteristically commonplace. Among the great diversity of pictures which he invokes the unpoetic details of the world of today occupy a dominant position. Nature is represented in seascapes (for Giraudoux is a globe-

trotter) and in the realistic depiction of the French countryside. The rivers of Limousin with their locks and sluice-gates furnish the basis of many comparisons. Reference to hills, trees, foliage, and fruit add a rural touch here and there. Both farm animals and beasts of the meadow and forest also contribute. Horses, dogs, and cats furnish especially favored allusions. Frequently birds are used to symbolize thoughts, sentiments, or memories. Giraudoux draws many figures from the world of insects. The possibilities of parts of the human body for metaphorical reference are not overlooked. Allusions to the life of children maintain the familiar, child-like quality of Giraudoux's work, which has been noticed so often. Garments provide a number of ingenious images. What is especially striking is the intimate glimpses of unpretentious middle class life which the metaphors afford. Innumerable are the allusions to the details of housekeeping—cleaning, washing, cooking. Each room of a typical bourgeois dwelling contributes to the content of Giraudoux's imagery. Among the miscellany of trivial objects used as terms of comparison, timepieces of various sorts are probably the most common. Just as the experiences of Giraudoux's childhood and private life contribute largely to the content of his metaphors, so also his wide culture and activities are a determining factor. There are frequent references to the physical aspect of books, to printing, to writing, and to punctuation. Scholarly allusions to scientific subjects may occasionally trip the reader. The metaphor takes him into the field of biological and mathematical sciences and into medicine. Of the arts, allusions to the theater, the cinema, painting, and sculpture, are plentiful. Music and literature are more rarely called upon. Some metaphors remind us that Giraudoux has been an outstanding soldier and athlete. War images recall his participation in the war of 1914. He has always championed the cause of athletics in France and the wide range of allusions to sports is testimony to this interest. Images involving modern means of conveyance and communication illustrate how Giraudoux utilizes the mechanical world of today. The airplane, the typewriter, and the telegraph represent the *merveilleux moderne* in the Giralducian metaphor.

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The form of Giraudoux's metaphors presupposes a spontaneous style—a free association of ideas. Composition, in the ordinary sense of the word, is lacking: it is replaced by an intricate pattern of varied

and recurring images transferred unaltered from the mind stream to the manuscript. The reader must follow the author's vagaries from the beginning, for metaphors out of context may be meaningless. The borrowed term is frequently found in a previous plain statement. It may linger for a long time, attaching itself with astounding results to a variety of subsequent ideas. Metaphors seems to evolve from the text. The free association of ideas is controlled by perception, imagination, or fancy. Often a metaphorical divagation has a perceptual point of departure, but is sustained by imagination or fancy. Metaphors which have or affect to have mistaken identification as their basis are the purest example of the perceptual figure. The imaginative figure is characterized by its lyricism and poetry. Giraudoux has two types: the baroque with an overpowering emotional content, and the rococo with a delicate prettiness and refinement. Neither occupies a prominent place in his work, but the former less than the latter; for the author exercises a rigid control over his feelings, and poetic effusions are rarely sustained. This critical attitude is a manifestation of the intellectuality which pervades Giraudoux's work and turns his metaphors toward the conceit. The fanciful conceit is far more common than the perceptual or imaginative metaphor. Giraudoux's attempts to impose a human control over nature are revealed by this tendency. By combining the great aspects of nature with banal objects of civilization he reduces the former to the insignificance of the latter. A common form of the fanciful metaphor is the hyperbole. Both diminution and amplification may be observed. Exaggeration and over-statement, prodigious discrepancy in size are humorous devices. Word play is the key to many fanciful metaphors. Giraudoux's mental acumen and predilection for the concrete enable him to revitalize linguistic husks —clichés and words whose original meaning had long been overlooked. Old jewels which had lost their luster are once again brilliant. Frequently images are based merely on puns. There is a constant juggling of the literal and figurative, without any regard for established distinctions. A number of figures take the form of a false parallel. Words belonging to different categories—the physical, the incorporeal, and the abstract—are treated as if they were equal. The analogy in the fanciful metaphor may be only apparent, based exclusively on verbal suggestion. One would attempt in vain to identify the terms of such figures. They are products of Giraudoux's spontaneous and automatic style. The lack of studied craftsmanship is evidenced by his unevenness; the banal and the trite are

not scorned. But the author is not unaware that his mania for comparison may have its risible side and he is the first to make fun of it. At times the Giralducian metaphor appears as a fanciful explanation, a reason, or an interpretation. In the explanatory figure a pattern approaching a mathematical equation can be observed. An epithet frequently contains the fanciful metaphor. Qualifying adjectives, witty and *précieux* definitions, aphorisms, and paraphrases are also characteristic forms.

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In the art of description and characterization the metaphor has assumed complete supremacy and has revolutionized the novelist's technique. A comparison of the Goncourts' style with Giraudoux's shows to what an extent this is true. Giraudoux's exploitation of the metaphor gives a dynamic quality to his writing. It is a continual evocation of unexpected and widely disparate images, the abrupt encounter with which exposes a multitude of hidden affinities. Spontaneity and subjectivity take the place of craftsmanship and logical arrangement. Giraudoux's fancy takes him where it will. Characterization is no longer a patient study but stylization and a rapid succession of subtle direct "insights." The originality of Giraudoux is unquestionable. His art is a manifestation of an ardent desire to break the ossified tradition of nineteenth century prose and to penetrate through the conventional to something more real. With others of the post-war period he endorses the dynamic point of view in art as opposed to the cult of masterpieces. Self-expression is more important than acclaim. Self-katharsis is one aspect of the escape which is the *raison d'être* of Giraudoux's work. The liberating joy of creation is obtained chiefly by use of the metaphor. It severs the bonds connecting the writer with the world of actuality, enabling him to live in a paradise of his choosing. One must not label such an attitude mere self-delusion, for this world attained through metaphor may be far more real than we suspect. Personality is masked by conventions, occupations, etc., which make reflexes of one's actions. Symbolists and recent philosophers assert that only by the spontaneous metaphor can one contemplate his true personality and discover intuitively reality behind appearance. But the symbolists believed that the metaphor could be a metaphysical instrument only in so far as it was "inevitable"—that is to say, a single mysterious bond between objects in nature. Chance

was excluded from their poetic alchemy. To reconcile Giraudoux and the *poètes fantaisistes* with this symbolistic point of view, chronology must be taken into consideration. The *débâcle* of symbolistic strivings forced the *jeunes* to the position of cynical fortuity. They refuse to be dupes and protect themselves by emphasizing the trivality of their *jeux de hasard*. Nevertheless the fortuity of their pranks discredits the world of appearances, thereby serving at least negatively in the cause of symbolism. Thus Jean Giraudoux, leader of the contemporary French imagists, gives new expression to the theories of the literary group which nurtured his incipent genius.

VITA

Laurence LeSage was born September 30, 1913, in East Troy, Wisconsin. A graduate of the Rockford High School, he attended the Teachers College at Platteville, Wisconsin, for two years before matriculating at the University of Illinois in 1933. He obtained the A. B. degree (with high honors) in 1935; and the A. M. degree in 1936, after a year as a service scholar in Romance Languages. Since 1936 he has been an assistant in French at the University of Illinois and has continued his graduate work in French, Spanish, and German. The summer of 1939 he gathered material for his doctoral dissertation at the Bibliothèque Nationale. As an undergraduate he was awarded University Honors and elected to Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, and Pi Delta Phi; in April, 1940, he was elected national president of the French honorary society Pi Delta Phi. He has attended the courses of Professors Aron, Balseiro, Carnahan, Jacob, Michaud, Oliver, Van Horne, and Will. To each he wishes to express his gratitude, especially to the late Professor Régis Michaud, who suggested the title of this dissertation, and to Professor Joseph F. Jackson, under whose direction it has been completed. He wishes to thank also Professors Jacob and Will for their kindly suggestions in the course of the preparation of this dissertation.